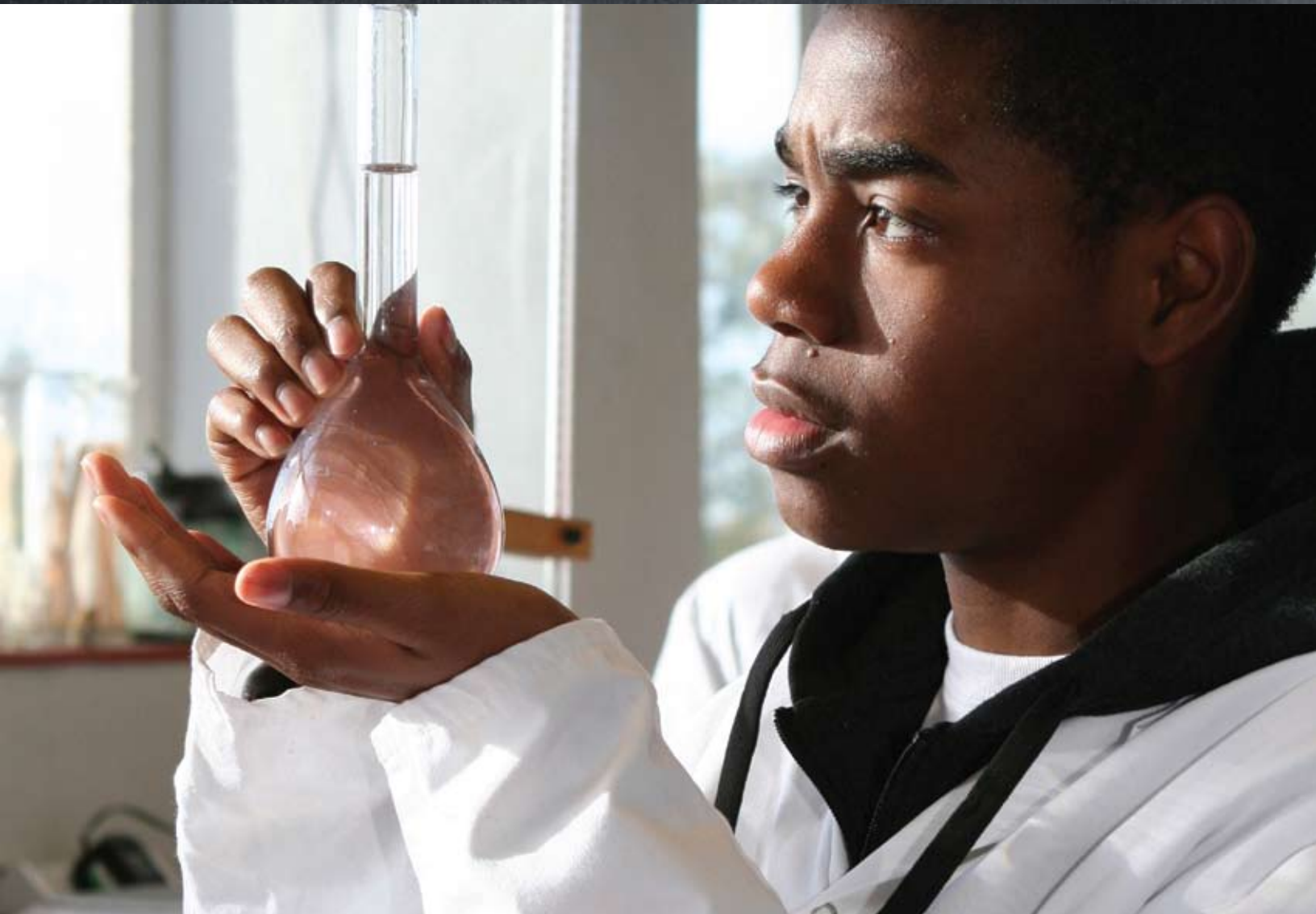




# Can Illinois “Race to the Top?”

Yes, We Can!



EVERY STUDENT WORLD READY

# Can Illinois “Race to the Top?”

**Yes, We Can!**

Illinois students deserve the best education in the world. They don’t have it now. We can give it to them if we think creatively and act boldly. And we can get a head start, thanks to historic funding available from the U.S. Department of Education.

How much funding? Between \$200 and \$400 million would be Illinois’ prize if it wins the U.S. Department of Education’s “Race to the Top” competition.<sup>1</sup> That’s a substantial investment in change. It’s not just a little change, but a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a fundamental shift – a paradigm shift – in how our schools set goals, support good instruction, and measure progress and results.

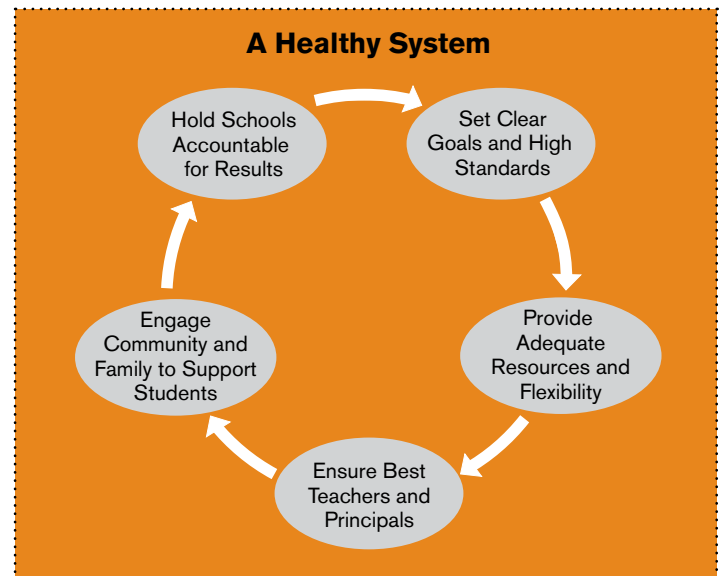
This report lays out a new vision for Illinois’ education system and shows how “Race to the Top” funds can help get us started, putting together that vision, piece by piece. Some of those pieces are already in place, but more work needs to be done to put it all together. Other states are putting the pieces together, and some are working faster and smarter than others. Can we keep up? Can we “Race to the Top?”

**Yes, we can. But it won’t be easy.**

## Illinois Can Do Better

**Right now, the accountability of our education system is upside down:** Instead of being held accountable for clear and relevant outcomes and given the flexibility and support to achieve them, schools are provided little guidance on what results they are expected to achieve (let alone the ability to adjust goals based on local realities and needs), and are primarily held accountable for whether they comply with a growing list of mandates.

**In a Healthy System, it should be the other way around:** leaders at the state, district, and school level should define success clearly, recruit and support the right people, give them the tools to be successful, and **focus on results**.



For evidence that our system is not working well, consider our results. While performance on tests has been flat or declining for years, students overseas are improving academically and, for the first time in history, graduating at a higher rate than their peers here. In Illinois alone, 41,000 students drop out each year, costing us billions.<sup>2</sup> We have the second-worst achievement gap in the country, which is morally and economically intolerable.<sup>3</sup> The current system is broken and failing our children.

## How Does “Race to the Top” Help?

### “Race to the Top” 101

**What is “Race to the Top?”** The U.S. Department of Education is making \$4.35 billion in competitive funds available for a handful of states prepared to take dramatic steps to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps. Proposals for “Race to the Top” funds are to be submitted by the governor of each state and must explain how the state intends to address four key aspects of a healthy school system:

1. Establishing a common core of rigorous standards and assessments;
2. Ensuring top-quality teachers and principals in all schools;
3. Building powerful longitudinal data systems to inform decision-making at all levels; and
4. Shaping a plan to intervene in chronically failing schools.

**When are applications due?** The “Race to the Top” funds will be awarded in two rounds, in April and September of 2010. Applications for the first round are due in mid-January 2010, and applications for the second round are due in April. The impending deadline means that states must act quickly to prepare their applications and to lay the policy and legislative groundwork for a competitive application.

**How much money might come to Illinois?** While no one can be sure right now how many states will “win,” Illinois would be eligible for between \$200 to \$400 million dollars.<sup>4</sup>  
**But only if we act boldly.**

### What is the U.S. Department of Education looking for?

Decisions on winning states will be based on (1) current school policies, as well as (2) plans and progress towards implementing additional reforms. That means we need **both** a strong, focused application and the right legislative and regulatory conditions necessary to support change. For example, if Illinois chooses to offer incentives to bring effective principals and teachers to struggling schools while offering districts freedom from certain mandates to do so, the state must have the laws and regulations in place to support such a strategy.

## The First Step in the “Race”

In determining eligibility, the U.S. Department of Education has two explicit and absolute requirements before it will award a “Race to the Top” grant.<sup>5</sup> Illinois is on track to meet both requirements.

“RACE TO THE TOP” REQUIREMENT	ILLINOIS STATUS
“Approved application for Phase 2 State Stabilization Funds”	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One of first states to apply for Phase 1</li><li>• On-track for Phase 2 Application</li></ul>
“No legal barrier to linking student achievement data to teachers or principals for use in evaluation”	✓ <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recent legislation permits the linking of student and teacher data for purposes of evaluation</li></ul>

## The Next Steps in the “Race”

The “Race” is a real competition. While the U.S. Department of Education has listed criteria it will use to judge state applications, it's not a checklist of items (i.e., “do these things and we'll give you the money”), it's a competition. In order to win, Illinois has to be among the best in these areas. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education has assigned points in each area and will be using those points to assess each state's plan. (See Appendix for a breakdown of how points will be awarded.)

### Two of the areas assess broad reform conditions.

**State Success Factors**, will judge states on:

- A vision for reform;
- Support from stakeholders, including unions and districts;
- Capacity to support reform; and
- Demonstrated progress in raising achievement.

**General Selection Criteria**, asks states to prove they are financially committed to reform, and that they support innovative educational models, including charter schools. This report focuses on these four specific areas of reform.

## “RACE TO THE TOP” CRITERIA AREAS

1. Strong Standards and Assessments
2. Great Teachers and Leaders
3. Data Systems to Support Instruction
4. A Plan to Turn Around the Lowest-Performing Achieving Schools

## COMPONENTS OF A HEALTHY SYSTEM

1. Goals and High Standards
2. Effective Teachers and Principals
3. Adequate Resources and Flexibility
4. Meaningful, Relevant Accountability

### How the “Race” Accelerates Reform

As in any race, there’s a moment when the competitors separate from each other, when the leaders break from the pack. In the “Race to the Top,” that will likely happen in the four specific areas of reform laid out in the application. The good news is that these areas are consistent with a healthy education system – that is, they are things Illinois either is or should be addressing if we are to prepare our children for a changing economy and citizenry.

In other words, these reforms are the right thing to do for our state, regardless of the funding opportunity.

In fact, state leaders have already identified many of these same reforms as priorities. “Race to the Top” is simply our best chance to fund these needed reforms in an otherwise challenging fiscal climate.

We will spell out the ways Illinois is working to address each of these reform areas and how the “Race to the Top” can help Illinois go further.

**A critical point to make here:** A state’s plan must show a commitment to ALL FOUR reform areas and articulate a comprehensive approach to these reforms. We can’t pick and choose, or count on strength in one area to carry us.

**But, before we go into each area, we need to answer an obvious question:**

### Does Illinois Have a Shot at Winning the “Race to the Top?” Yes! But...

Illinois is “on the bubble.” The state has recently made a number of smart reforms that should put us in a stronger position, including:

- Authorizing creation of a statewide longitudinal data system (and securing a \$9 million federal grant to help jump-start implementation);
- Raising the cap on the number of charter schools permitted in the state;
- Creating a process to qualify high-quality organizations to partner with districts for intervention in the state’s struggling schools; and
- Convening a “P-20 Council” to align the state’s work from pre-school to post-secondary/career.

Even in the face of such progress, Illinois has been judged “somewhat competitive” by an independent analysis.<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, we must commit to additional and dramatic changes in the way we educate our children. The strongest applications will not only address each requirement but will present cutting-edge solutions – weaving bold reforms into an interconnected, comprehensive plan for broad change. They will articulate a vision for a system organized around results, not compliance. That’s good for our children and good for Illinois.

**Let’s get started.**

# 1

## Criteria Area: Standards and Assessments

What gets measured, gets done. It's a cliché that rests on a fundamental reality. If we want students to achieve, we must set high expectations. If we want schools to be stimulating, engaging, safe, and supportive places, we must measure progress on these goals.

"Race to the Top" asks states to raise the bar on student achievement "to better prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy." Specifically, the U.S. Department of Education is asking states to work together to:

1. Develop and implement a common core of standards that are focused and rigorous;
2. Pair these with assessments that measure a more complex array of skills and benchmark our progress nationally and internationally.

### Where Does Illinois Stand Now?

***While more remains to be done, Illinois began taking sound steps prior to "Race to the Top," and is well-positioned in this area.***

It's clear that our present standards are too low. At the elementary level, our progress on state tests does not match up with progress charted on national tests.<sup>7</sup> At the secondary level, too many of our students are graduating from high school with passing grades but they are then forced to take remedial classes in college or they can't find work because they don't have skills needed for the modern workforce.<sup>8</sup> Finally, while the skills students need continue to evolve and expand, our assessments have not kept pace.

Thanks to the leadership from the State Board of Education, the Board of Higher Education, the Community College Board and the Illinois Business Roundtable, Illinois began revising its standards before there was a "Race to the Top." Specifically, Illinois joined the America Diploma Project and has taken a lead role in the multi-state Common Core Standards Initiative last year to create common internationally benchmarked standards and assessments. In addition, Illinois signed on to the 21st Century Skills consortium to determine how best to measure the skills necessary to succeed in a global economy (e.g., problem-solving, critical thinking, finding and using information).

However, unlike many other states, Illinois has not set "readiness" standards for its students as they begin school or as they finish it. That is, we do not currently know whether students entering kindergarten are developmentally, cognitively, or socially "ready" for school. Nor have we determined what classes, experiences, and achievement levels make a child "college-ready." Absent such definitions and measures, parents and schools cannot catch problems early, shape needed programs, or understand whether students are on track.

## Using “Race to the Top” Funds at the District Level

Ten years ago, Arlington Heights' Hersey High School redesigned its core curriculum to align with the skills and content of the ACT and AP tests. The core courses integrated skills and content in alignment with the two tests, and even sought ways to reinforce the integration by designing interdisciplinary work where possible and feasible. The work students do gives them feedback on their performance and identifies where they need to spend extra time. The end result: after three years, Hersey's scores on the ACT shot upward – in some cases 50% more than the annual growth one would expect, particularly in English. The school had to buy all new books, develop lesson plans, and invest in ongoing teacher training. **“Race to the Top” dollars could help other schools and districts replicate Hersey's success.**

In addition, the use of formative assessments – assessments that give teachers information along the way on how students are progressing on key skills and content – is still scattered in Illinois. This is despite the fact that well-crafted, formative assessments have been demonstrated time and again to help teachers tailor instruction and to result in strong student gains.<sup>9</sup>

## How Can “Race to the Top” Help?

Though already committed to tightening our standards, the reality is that the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), districts, and schools don't have the money to take this work to the next level. Implementing new standards requires significant upfront investment. “Race to the Top” would provide the funds necessary to develop new curriculum and assessments, buy new textbooks, and provide the training needed to bring new standards to life in the classroom. Moreover, by joining forces with 48 other states, Illinois can dramatically reduce the costs involved in shaping new curriculum and assessments.

## How Can We Improve Our Odds of Winning?

### To be competitive, Illinois must:

- **Stay the course on strengthening standards and assessments**, including participation in the American Diploma Project and the multi-state Common Core Standards Initiative, with the goal of measuring a broader set of skills;
- **Define kindergarten readiness and college readiness**, to provide early indicators of progress and clear paths to college and career, emphasizing STEM;
- **Outline implementation strategies** for how the newly developed standards will be rolled out to districts, schools, and classrooms throughout the state, including training so that teachers, principals and superintendents can put new standards to work;
- **Strengthen and support implementation of formative assessments** designed to measure interim student progress toward new standards, including support for local district training and adoption; and
- **Adopt a common method for measuring student academic growth** over the school year – a key component of a stronger evaluation system.

### To be **BOLDER**, Illinois could:

- **Design and implement a broader, more strategic state report card** to capture a picture of Illinois' educational health against national and international benchmarks, including early childhood and post-secondary success, etc.;
- **Adopt and conduct statewide school climate surveys to measure** school safety, professional working conditions, student and parental engagement; and
- **Introduce 21st century innovation in assessments.** Examples include on-line testing and high school end-of-course exams so students can be tested in subjects like Algebra I and Algebra II when they complete the course, rather than arbitrarily in their Junior year.

# 2

## Criteria Area: Great Teachers and Leaders

Effective teachers are the single most important factor in student success.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, we know that effective leadership is essential to building and keeping strong teams of teachers.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, “Race to the Top’s” push to challenge and support states to invest deeply in our people is well-judged.

“Race to the Top” asks states to prepare, develop, evaluate, and place the most effective teachers and principals in every school. Specifically, the U.S. Department of Education is challenging states to:

1. Strengthen teacher and principal preparation programs;
2. Expand alternative routes to certification;
3. Support teachers and principals (especially in the early years);
4. Evaluate teachers and principals based on their performance;
5. Ensure that effective teachers and principals serve the students who need them most.

### Where Does Illinois Stand Now?

***This is a critical area in the “Race to the Top” application – 25% of the state proposal’s point total depend on this element – and unfortunately it is the area in which Illinois has the most work to do.***

Right now, we don’t recruit from a wide enough pool of candidates. We don’t train teachers and principals for many of the challenges they will face. We don’t support them in the early years. We don’t evaluate them in any meaningful way. We don’t reward them when they perform beyond our expectations. Finally, we do little to ensure that high-impact educators serve our most vulnerable students.

Illinois has some hard work to do to be competitive in this critical area.<sup>12</sup> Last year, the Illinois State Board of Education set new standards for principal preparation programs, requiring programs to redesign their admissions and training or face losing accreditation. This same review must occur for teacher preparation, and we must expand access to successful alternative certification programs.

### A Career Continuum



## Using “Race to the Top” Funds at the District Level

*One test score should not determine a teacher's pay, but if we're asking teachers to help our students learn, shouldn't we measure whether they're learning? Evanston's Elementary School District 65 is working with its teacher leadership to do just that. Local districts willing to innovate and work with their local teacher leadership could use “Race to the Top” dollars to plan, design, and implement a blend of measures that, like Evanston, combine student achievement (measured by a student's growth over time, not just results from one year-end test) with an overall evaluation of performance on a thoughtful set of measures (such as Charlotte Danielson's framework). The resulting blended evaluation would keep the focus on student achievement and support continuous development for teachers across the spectrum.*

On another front, Illinois has established standards for teacher mentoring, but has not fully funded this work or developed measures to differentiate between high and low quality support. Moreover, work in this area lags for principals and superintendents.

Finally, the most critical element in any of the four reform areas is an evaluation system that gives teachers and principals feedback on their performance, that incorporates student achievement as a measure of effectiveness, and that distinguishes between effective and ineffective personnel.<sup>13</sup> Teaching and leading a school are among the toughest jobs around. Without honest feedback grounded in student progress, teachers and principals cannot improve their craft, and decisions about who to place with high-need children and who to gracefully exit from the profession are not based on performance.

## How Can “Race to the Top” Help?

Developing tools like these take an up-front and ongoing investment in training. The payoff is a system that develops talent. “Race to the Top” funds could help the state and districts make early investments in developing and rolling out a performance-based evaluation system. To be clear, though, progress in this area should come with assurance of ongoing state support.

## Where Illinois Leads

The Illinois Education Research Council has developed an index for measuring teacher academic capital, which can help the state determine whether at-risk students are getting the teachers they need.<sup>14</sup> This index has been used to show that, in Illinois, effective teachers are not equitably distributed and that Chicago's teacher quality has improved over the past five years. Chicago's improvement has been driven by new district policies and by the work of such groups as The New Teacher Project, New Leaders for New Schools, The New Teacher Center, Teach For America, and the Academy for Urban School Leadership.

## How Can We Improve Our Odds of Winning?

### To be competitive, Illinois must:

- **Pass legislation revising how districts evaluate teachers and principals**, including student performance as an evaluation element, and linking evaluations to certification and tenure decisions;
- **Continue work of the Illinois Principals Association and the Large Unit District Association to strengthen principal evaluation**;
- **Strengthen access to alternative certification**, especially for math and science teachers;
- **Raise entry requirements for teacher and principal candidates** including changing rules surrounding entrance exams, as well as working with teacher certification programs to elevate the academic caliber of those entering the profession; and
- **Give districts and schools the resources and flexibility to attract and support effective teachers and principals, and ensure they reach the most vulnerable students.**

### To be **BOLDER**, Illinois could:

- **Link accreditation of teacher and principal preparation programs and expansion of alternative certification programs to the performance of their graduates**;
- **In struggling schools, base “reduction in force” decisions on performance, rather than seniority.** Where schools are chronically failing, ensure that personnel decisions are based on performance rather than on seniority; and
- **Expand leadership mentoring and development efforts with proven track record.** Programs like The National School Administration Manager Project have demonstrated success in developing principals as instructional leaders.

# 3

## Criteria Area: Data Systems to Support Instruction

In schools, as elsewhere, decisions should rest on sound information. Where teachers have timely data on how students are doing along the way, they can tailor instruction more effectively.

“Race to the Top” challenges states to build a world-class data system for their schools. Specifically, the U.S. Department of Education is looking for states to:

1. Fully implement a statewide longitudinal data system that follows students from early childhood through higher education;
2. Build a system that permits districts, schools, teachers and parents to access and use data in a timely fashion;
3. Demonstrate that all involved are using data to improve instruction.

Building better data systems is an essential building block for improving instruction. Where principals have good information about school climate and student growth, they can target scarce resources more carefully on high-impact programs and interventions. Where families get thoughtful information on how their children are progressing, they can better support and advocate for their student. The bottom line is that you cannot manage what you cannot measure.

### Where Does Illinois Stand Now?

***Though Illinois may lose points for not yet implementing a longitudinal data system, the state has done what it can in the past year to set us on a clear path to satisfy these criteria.***

To make the best decisions on how to improve student achievement, educators need the best data on how those students are performing. A system that collects individualized, high-quality data over time – from pre-school through 12th grade and into college and employment – acts as the foundation, giving the entire education community the support to build improvements to the system at all levels. A new, stronger data system is also necessary in order to integrate stronger standards and assessments, thereby providing everyone from classroom teachers to state administrators access to real-time information on student progress toward world-class standards and expectations.

Right now, some schools in the state have excellent data systems, others lag far behind. Schools collect and control their own information. The Illinois Interactive Report Card provides an essential building block for allowing districts, schools, and teachers to access and use that data. But, there's not enough infrastructure for leaders to evaluate where additional support is required and which strategies and policies are making the biggest difference.

## Using “Race to the Top” Funds at the District Level

*In addressing the achievement gap between McClean County Unit District 5 and Bloomington School District 87, the local superintendents worked to create a data system that ensured that all teachers have a clear picture of the students in their classrooms from test scores to special needs to involvement with athletics or clubs. Working with local corporate citizen, State Farm,*

*school officials started building from the ground up an accessible, user-friendly data interface that teachers are now using to plan and understand student needs and develop targeted lesson plans. Incredibly this data system has brought together the community, involved business, and provided teachers a system that supports their work.*

The state has already taken strong steps in this area, including passing legislation authorizing and creating a longitudinal data system that will place the state at the national forefront. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education has awarded a \$9 million grant to the state to launch this work. The key, going forward, is to build the system – at the state and the local levels.<sup>15</sup>

### How Can “Race to the Top” Help?

Building a world-class data system will require investing in infrastructure at every level, developing software, and integrating existing systems around the state. “Race to the Top” funds can help the state make the necessary up-front investments to begin this process, including bringing the necessary technical capacity to under-served regions of the state. Along the way, the state and local districts can lay the foundation for performance management systems to make data more accessible and provide technology that enables teachers, schools, and districts to more readily collaborate and support each other.

New and richer data can also drive more robust educational research to inform policy and practice. Illinois is home to many experienced research partners, including the Chicago Consortium on School Research and the Illinois Education Research Council, as well as dozens of high quality research entities housed in Illinois institutions of higher education. The state has substantial “research and development” capacity – we lack only a plan to harness it.

### How Can We Improve Our Odds of Winning?

#### To be competitive, Illinois must:

- **Strengthen our data capacity** by designing and implementing a cutting-edge system that makes use of all available data at the student, teacher, classroom, school, district, and state levels from early childhood through post-secondary;
- **Put data to use.** Establish clear performance goals and metrics and provide tools for teachers, principals and superintendents to inform instruction and management;
- **Ensure that data is user-friendly** by convening a collaborative group of stakeholders and conducting significant local outreach to ensure that data is collected, reported, and made available in ways useful to local schools and districts;
- **Build data links to teacher and principal preparation programs**, so that aspiring teachers and school districts understand program strength;
- **Provide coordinated governance** via a clear strategy for managing data collection, establishing guidelines, and structuring best use of data across systems from early childhood to higher education; and
- **Continue to develop and sign data sharing agreements.**

#### To be **BOLDER**, Illinois could:

- **Create a public web interface to provide user-friendly, readable data, public access, and transparency.** The state is looking to partner with vendors with demonstrated success implementing complex data systems; and
- **Invest in an ongoing Education Research Collaborative** to dig deeply to illuminate strategies that work versus those that aren’t working, and thereby guide policy and long-term decision-making in a more results-oriented system. Illinois can build on its bench strength of higher education and research institutions, as well the experience of the Illinois Education Research Council and the Consortium for Chicago School Research.

# 4

## Criteria Area: Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

When we let schools continue to struggle, we are dooming their students to long-term failure. “Race to the Top” encourages the state to develop a strategy to address this crisis.

“Race to the Top” challenges states to address the needs of all of its students by targeting those schools that aren’t meeting their students’ needs. Specifically, the U.S. Department of Education is challenging states to:

1. Intervene in its lowest-achieving schools and districts;
2. Demonstrate success in turning around their performance.

*In addition, the U.S. Department of Education specifically asks states to support effective charter schools as an additional strategy for reaching under-served students.*

### Where Does Illinois Stand Now?

***Illinois has demonstrated a sincere interest in turning around its lowest performing schools and offering additional options for communities looking for new school solutions. Charter schools and flexibility in local decision-making are essential. The state must now more carefully define the problem and target federal and state dollars to support strategic change.***

More than 500 schools in Illinois are on the state’s Academic Watch List, as defined by No Child Left Behind.<sup>16</sup> While some are on the list for failure to reach a particular student group, others reflect chronic failure across the board on academic, graduation, and other measures. Each year, 41,000 Illinois

students drop out of school, and just one in four freshmen who start high school will finish with the skills needed for college and career.<sup>17</sup>

Before “Race to the Top” became a reality, the state started taking steps to develop a comprehensive school intervention strategy. Governor Quinn recently convened a School Intervention Task Force, as authorized by the General Assembly. Meanwhile, in 2008, ISBE won approval from the U.S. Department of Education to provide resources to Academic Watch List schools more narrowly tailored to their needs. Finally, ISBE has begun working with stakeholders to shape and launch a Partnership Zone, which would involve leveraging enriched resources and bringing experienced turnaround partners to struggling schools.<sup>18</sup>

Now, the state must thoughtfully and clearly define what constitutes a chronically failing school, and then review the school code to determine what authority districts and state agencies need to effectively intervene. In addition to “Race to the Top” dollars, states have access to significant federal School Improvement dollars to direct to its lowest-performing schools. However, without a clear strategy to attract and support new and existing teachers and principals to these schools, and without a strategy to give these educators the freedom and resources they need to more creatively and effectively tackle longstanding, complex challenges, as well as engage parents, little is likely to change.

In our favor, Illinois already has legal authority to intervene in failing schools and districts, and the state is home to some of the nation's leading turnaround organizations, including the Academy for Urban School Leadership. Union leadership has been eager to form partnerships in school turnaround efforts, and Illinois has significant turnaround experience both in the Chicago Public Schools, as well as in some downstate school districts.

However, this is largely new work for Illinois, and will require new infrastructure, funding and external partners to do well. In addition, new regulatory and statutory authorities to grant districts flexibility and support for local problem solving can strengthen the state's efforts. Focused leadership at ISBE and a number of qualified external organizations give us a leg up on building this capacity.

In terms of providing communities with strong new school options in the face of ongoing local school failings, Illinois allows charter schools and recently lifted the cap on the number permitted. It is worth noting, however, that only 10 charter schools have been authorized outside Chicago.<sup>19</sup>

### How Can “Race to the Top” Help?

Turning around low-performing schools is labor- and resource-intensive work that will almost certainly involve allowing schools to operate more flexibly. Breaking the cycle of failure in some schools may require bringing in targeted new talent, re-thinking staffing structures to permit more supportive adult/pupil ratios, extending the school day and year, reaching out to parents in new ways, and re-tooling a school's technology infrastructure. “Race to the Top” and other federal School Improvement funds can help defray many of these costs, but the state will need to analyze the ongoing funding, flexibilities, and freedoms from mandates required to sustain progress and determine whether it has the will to provide them. For their part, districts will have to determine whether they have the will to target existing resources more strategically. Both are conversations worth supporting.

### How Can We Improve Our Odds of Winning?

#### To be competitive, Illinois must:

- **Launch a state Partnership Zone**, including identification of experienced school turnaround partners and continued work with key stakeholders to ensure maximum talent attraction, investment, and buy-in;
- **Give struggling schools more flexibility to use resources and freedom** from key mandates to creatively tackle longstanding challenges, including the need for stronger student and social supports. Couple these with strong focus on results; and
- **Encourage the Intervention Task Force** to move expeditiously to issue findings.

#### To be **BOLDER**, Illinois could:

- **Establish an Innovation Fund** that would provide districts with flexible dollars in exchange for compelling plans to use research-based strategies to tackle targeted issues (e.g., attracting effective teachers and principals, extending the school day or year, lowering student/counselor ratios, creating or expanding community school programs, etc.) Schools/districts that meet agreed-upon outcomes within three years would continue to receive enhanced funding.

#### Using “Race to the Top” Funds at the District Level

*Less than 10 years ago, Champaign's Stratton Elementary was under-enrolled and struggling. Today, it is a Spotlight School on the state's Honor Roll. How did it make such a remarkable turnaround? Stratton used many of the same components called for in “Race to the Top,” including a focus on data, innovation, and teacher effectiveness. In addition to new formative assessments and a Reading Recovery program, Stratton extended its school day, offering teachers a \$5,000 stipend in exchange for an additional hour each day. That extra hour allows for greater staff collaboration and offers an opportunity to expand the curriculum. Stratton is just one example of what can happen if a school is given the resources required to engineer a turnaround and afforded the flexibility to innovate.*

## Conclusion

Can We Do This? **Yes, We Can!**

At this moment in history, with our schools in decline and as our trading partners pass us by, we must take action to make sure all of our students are world-ready.

Though Illinois languishes with one of the worst achievement gaps in the country,<sup>20</sup> there are schools around the state and across the country that are educating all students to high levels under trying conditions. “Race to the Top” offers a once-in-a-lifetime funding opportunity to put our collective noses to the grindstone to tackle critical and timely issues.

The good news is that Illinois has taken some significant steps in the past few years to lay the groundwork for more rigorous standards, more complex assessments, longitudinal data systems, and a more strategic approach to our lowest performing schools. But more needs to be done if we are to pull to the head of the pack – to secure federal funds and, more importantly, to secure our children’s future.

We owe our children the most effective teachers and principals in every classroom and school. We owe dedicated professionals clear goals to pursue, real freedom, data, and support to respond to the challenges at hand, as well honest feedback about how they are doing. And we owe our families and our future tough accountability for results on the measures that matter.

The “Race to the Top” competition is a call to action and a helping hand along the way. The bottom line is that, absent the federal funding, the work still needs to be done.

“It’s time to stop just talking about education reform and start actually doing it. It’s time to make education America’s national mission.”

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, NOVEMBER 4, 2009

# Appendix

## U.S. Department of Education “Race to the Top” Key Facts

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### Deadlines

- The Department plans to make “Race to the Top” grants in two phases. States that are ready to apply now may do so in Phase 1; States that need more time may apply in Phase 2. States that apply in Phase 1 but are not awarded grants may reapply for funding in Phase 2, together with States that are applying for the first time in Phase 2. Phase 1 grantees may not apply for additional funding in Phase 2.
- Phase 1 Applications Due: January 19, 2010
- Phase 1 Awards Announced: April 2010
- Phase 2 Applications Due: June 1, 2010
- Phase 2 Awards Announced: September 2010

### Overview of Program and Points

#### Selection Criteria

#### A. State Success Factors (125 points)

- (A)(1) Articulating State’s education reform agenda and LEAs’ participation in it (65 points)
- (A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans (30 points)
- (A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps (30 points)

#### B. Standards and Assessments (70 points)

- (B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards (40 points)
- (B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments (10 points)
- (B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments (20 points)

#### C. Data Systems to Support Instruction (47 points)

- (C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system (24 points)
- (C)(2) Accessing and using State data (5 points)
- (C)(3) Using data to improve instruction (18 points)

#### D. Great Teachers and Leaders (138 points)

- (D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals (21 points)
- (D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance (58 points)
- (D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals (25 points)
- (D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs (14 points)
- (D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals (20 points)

#### E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (50 points)

- (E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs (10 points)
- (E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools (40 points)

#### F. General Selection Criteria (55 points)

- (F)(1) Making education funding a priority (10 points)
- (F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charters and other innovative schools (40 points)
- (F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions (5 points)

### Priorities

**Priority 1:** Absolute Priority – Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

**Priority 2:** Competitive Preference Priority – Emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) (15 points, all or nothing)

**Priority 3:** Invitational Priority – Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes

**Priority 4:** Invitational Priority – Expansion and Adaptation of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems

**Priority 5:** Invitational Priority – P-20 Coordination, Vertical and Horizontal Alignment

**Priority 6:** Invitational Priority – School-Level Conditions for Reform, Innovation, and Learning

For more information, <http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>

# Footnotes

1. U.S. Department of Education.
2. Alliance for Excellent Education. "Potential Economic Impacts of Improved Education in Illinois," 2008. \*\*If all heads of households had high school degrees, Illinois households would have \$2.8 billion more in accumulated wealth.
3. Ibid. \*\*If minorities graduated from Illinois high schools at the same rates as majority students, we would add \$13 billion to the Illinois economy by 2020.
4. U.S. Department of Education. \*\*The funds would be allocated to participating districts using Title I formulas, though the state can allocate more than 50% and this would be at the discretion of the state.
5. U.S. Department of Education. \*\*Phase 2 of State Fiscal Stabilization Fund requires districts to do much of the same work as "Race to the Top." The "Race to the Top" application does not add an extra burden on districts in exchange for its funding opportunity.
6. The New Teacher Project. "Interpreting Race To The Top," Sept. 2009.
7. ISAT (Illinois State Achievement Test) and NAEP (National Assessment of Academic Progress) results 2003, 2005, 2007
8. Alliance for Excellent Education. "Paying Double: Inadequate High Schools and Community College Remediation," 2006. \*\*It costs the U.S. approximately \$1.7 billion to provide educational supports and remedial educational opportunities for students to complete coursework that should have been taken at the high school level.
9. Educational Testing Services (ETS). "Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing it Right—Using it Well," 2006.
10. Education Trust. "Good Teaching Matters: How Well Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gaps," 1998.
11. The New Teacher Center. "Illinois Teaching, Leading and Learning Survey Final Report," 2008.
12. U.S. Department of Education. \*\*The "great teachers and leaders" criterion is weighted heavily on the Race to the Top application. It is worth up to 138 points of the 500 total points possible or almost 25% of Illinois' state application.
13. The New Teacher Project. "Hiring Assignment and Transfer in Chicago Public Schools," 2007. \*\*In Illinois, fewer than 1% of teachers have been deemed unsatisfactory. In Chicago, upwards of 93% of teachers are rated "superior" or "excellent" on evaluations.
14. Illinois Education Research Council. "Assessing Change in Access to Teacher Quality in Illinois," 2006.
15. U.S. Department of Education. \*\*The legislation calls for implementation of the new system by 2013. Meanwhile, the DOE may judge Illinois on the data system currently in use. If that is the case, Illinois will be in a worse position because it lacks the current capacity to link teachers to their students.
16. Northern Illinois University's Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC). \*\*591 schools in Illinois are on the state's academic watch list in 2009.
17. Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center. "Diploma Counts," 2008.
18. Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). \*\*The state has already issued a "Request for Proposals" to identify organizations that might provide outside support.
19. Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS) 2008. [incschools.org](http://incschools.org)
20. Ibid. Based on NAEP scores

"Race to the Top, will reward States that have demonstrated success in raising student achievement and have the best plans to accelerate their reforms in the future. These States will offer models for others to follow and will spread the best reform ideas across their States, and across the country."

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## Get Involved

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